

REMARKS

Initially, Applicants would like to express their appreciation to the Examiner for the detailed Official Action provided, for the acknowledgment of Applicants' Claim for Priority and receipt of the certified copies of the priority documents in the Official Action, and for the acknowledgment of Applicants' Information Disclosure Statement by return of the Form PTO-1449.

Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the indication that claims 1-5 are allowable, and that claim 24 contains allowable subject matter, on page 3 of the Official Action.

Upon entry of the above amendments, claims 6-22 and 24-28 will have been canceled and claim 23 will have been amended. Claims 1-5 and 23 are currently pending. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of the outstanding objections and rejections, and allowance of all the claims pending in the present application.

Applicants note that claim 23 has been amended to include the subject matter of claim 24, which the Examiner has indicated as being allowable. Further, Applicants note that the non-elected claims have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter thereof. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests an early indication of the allowance of all of the pending claims.

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On pages 2 and 3 of the Official Action, claim 23 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b). Applicants note that claim 23 has been amended to include the subject matter of claim 24, which the Examiner has indicated as being allowable. Accordingly, this rejection is deemed to be moot. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b), and an early indication of the allowance of all of the pending claims.

COMMENTS ON REASONS FOR ALLOWANCE

In regard to the Examiner's indication of allowable subject matter in claims 1-5 and 24 on pages 3 and 4 of the Official Action, Applicants do not disagree with the Examiner's indication that none of the references discloses a flexible plug having a channel formed on an inserting surface of the flexible plug. However, Applicants wish to make clear that the claims in the present application recite a combination of features, and that the patentability of these claims is also based on the totality of the features recited therein, which define over the prior art. Thus the reasons for allowance should not be limited to those mentioned by the Examiner.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

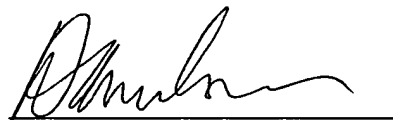
Entry and consideration of the present amendment, reconsideration of the outstanding Official Action, and allowance of the present application and all of the claims therein are respectfully requested and now believed to be appropriate.

Applicants have made a sincere effort to place the present application in condition for allowance and believe that they have now done so.

Any amendments to the claims that have been made in this amendment, which do not narrow the scope of the claims, and which have not been specifically noted to overcome a rejection based upon the prior art, should be considered cosmetic in nature, and to have been made for a purpose unrelated to patentability, and no estoppel should be deemed to attach thereto.

Should there be any questions or comments, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,
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December 22, 2004
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